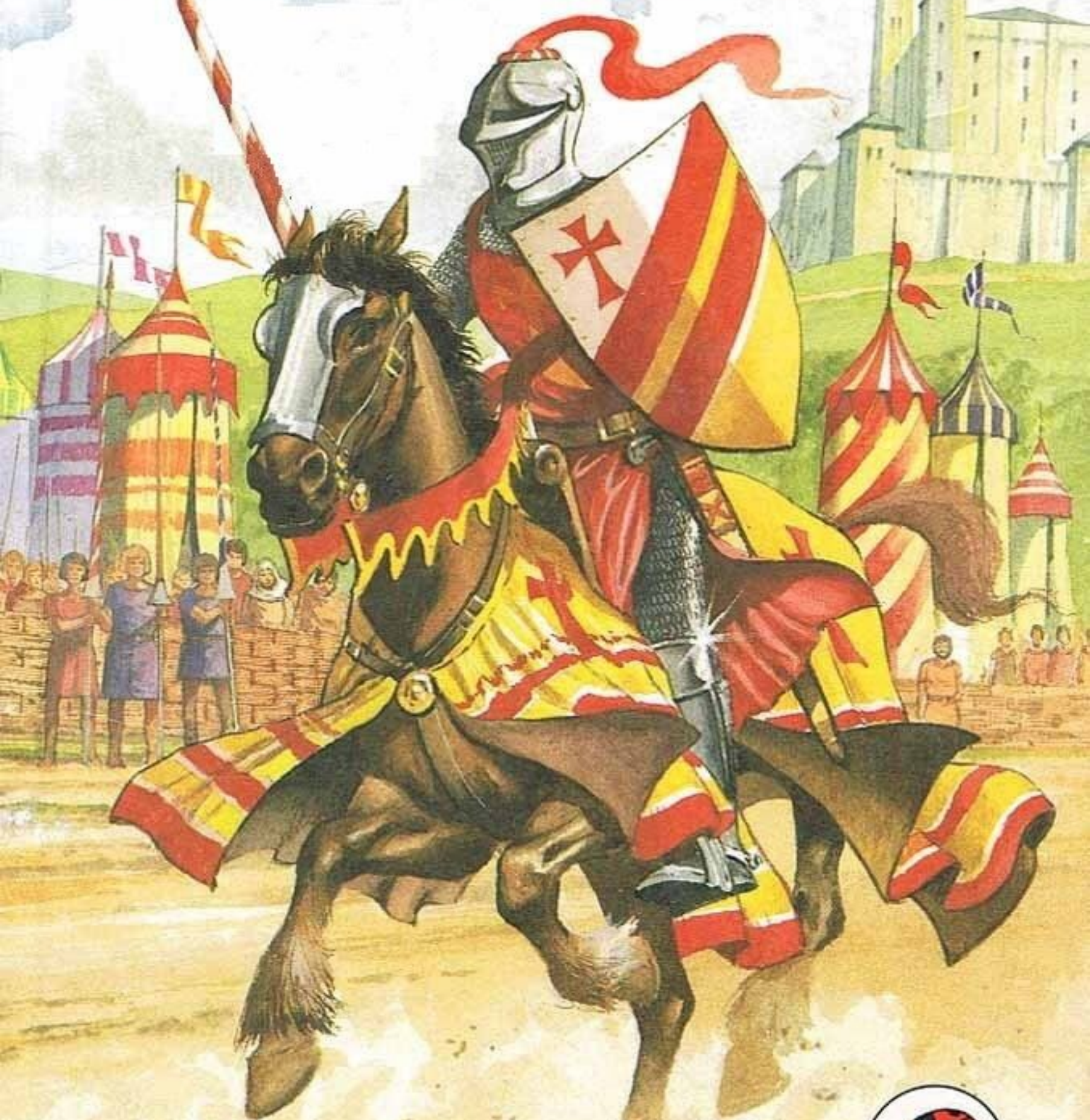


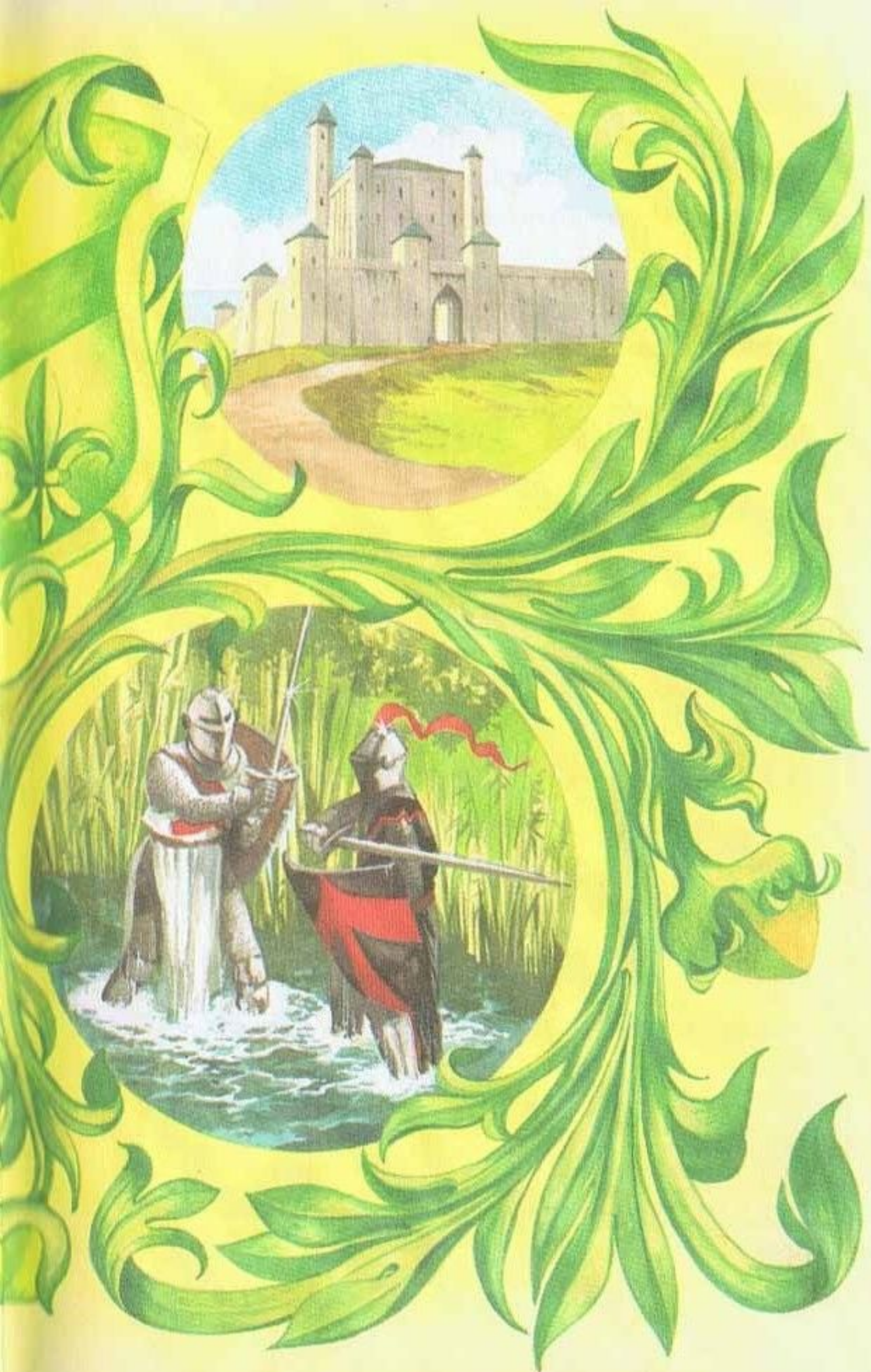
KING ARTHUR



Ladybird







There are many legends and tales about King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, some of them hundreds of years old.

This is a story about a young boy called Bran, whose adventures begin when he meets Sir Lancelot and is taken to King Arthur's Castle of Camelot.

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KING ARTHUR

**and the Knights of
the Round Table**



written by Joan Collins
illustrated by Malcolm Stokes

Ladybird Books



The rescued falcon

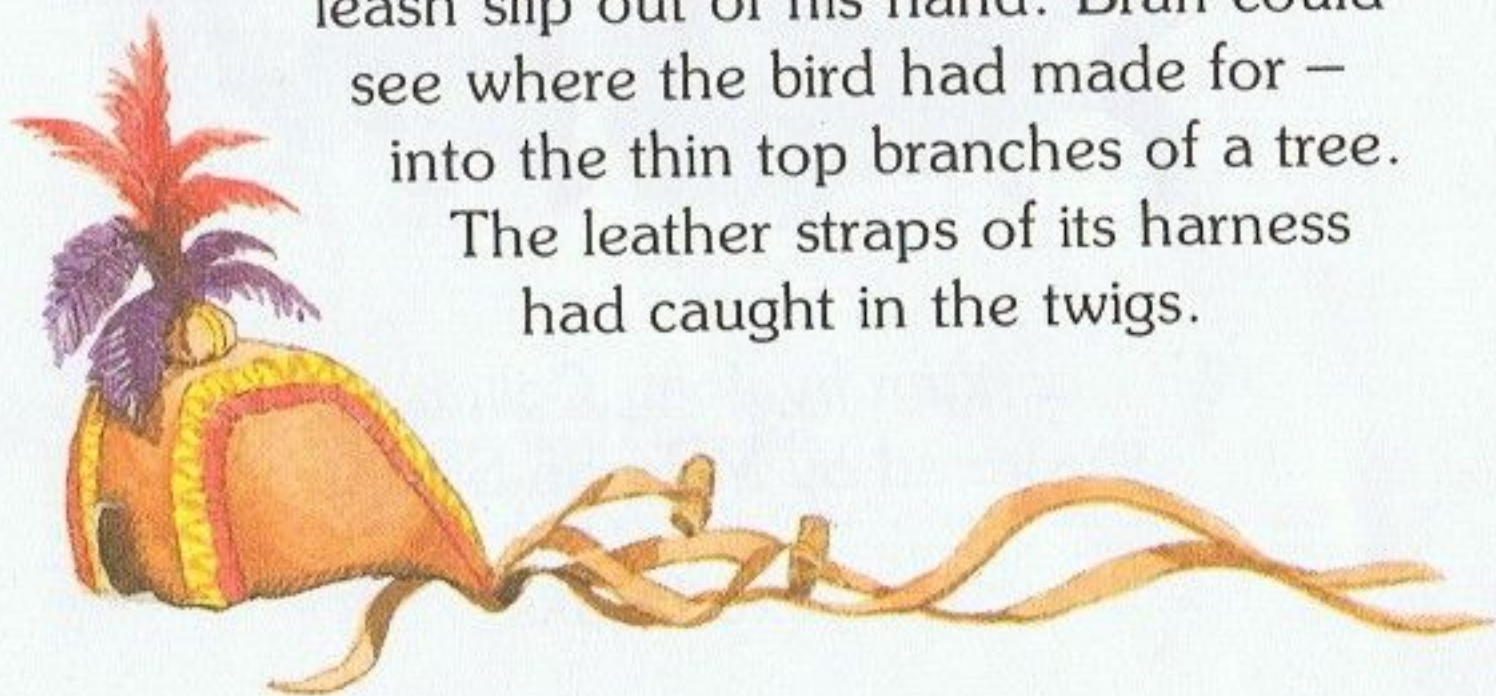
Bran was gathering firewood on the edge of the forest near the great Castle of Camelot. Not far away a knight and a falconer were training a hawk.

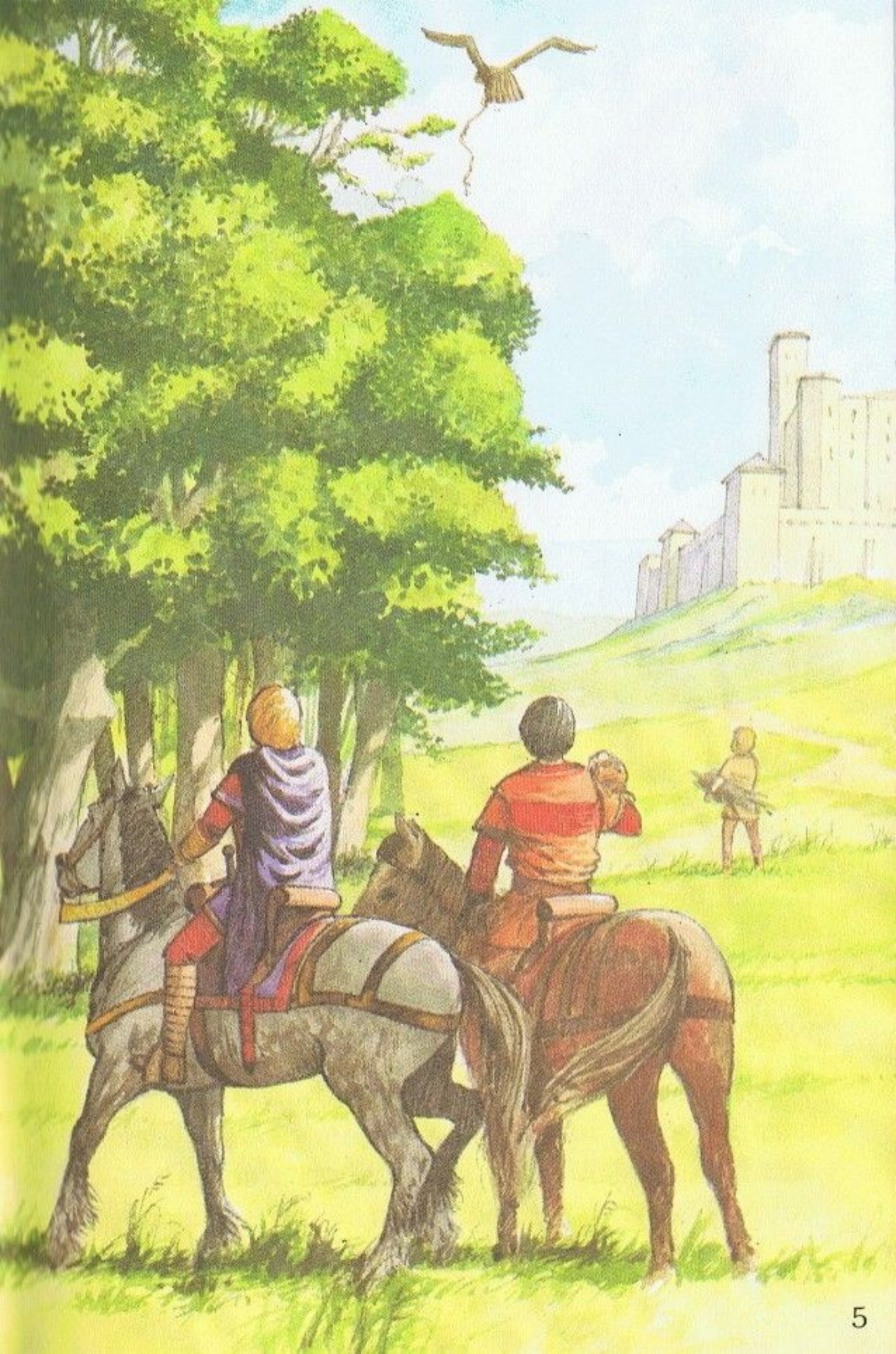
Bran was a falconer's son, so he watched eagerly. The bird rose up and hovered over its prey. Bran knew that it was a peregrine falcon, one of the strongest and swiftest of the hunting hawks.

'That man must be someone important, to have such a fine bird,' thought the boy. 'But if they're not careful, the bird will fly away. It's only half-trained!'

The falcon circled up into the sky and suddenly made for the forest. The falconer had let its long leash slip out of his hand. Bran could see where the bird had made for – into the thin top branches of a tree.

The leather straps of its harness had caught in the twigs.

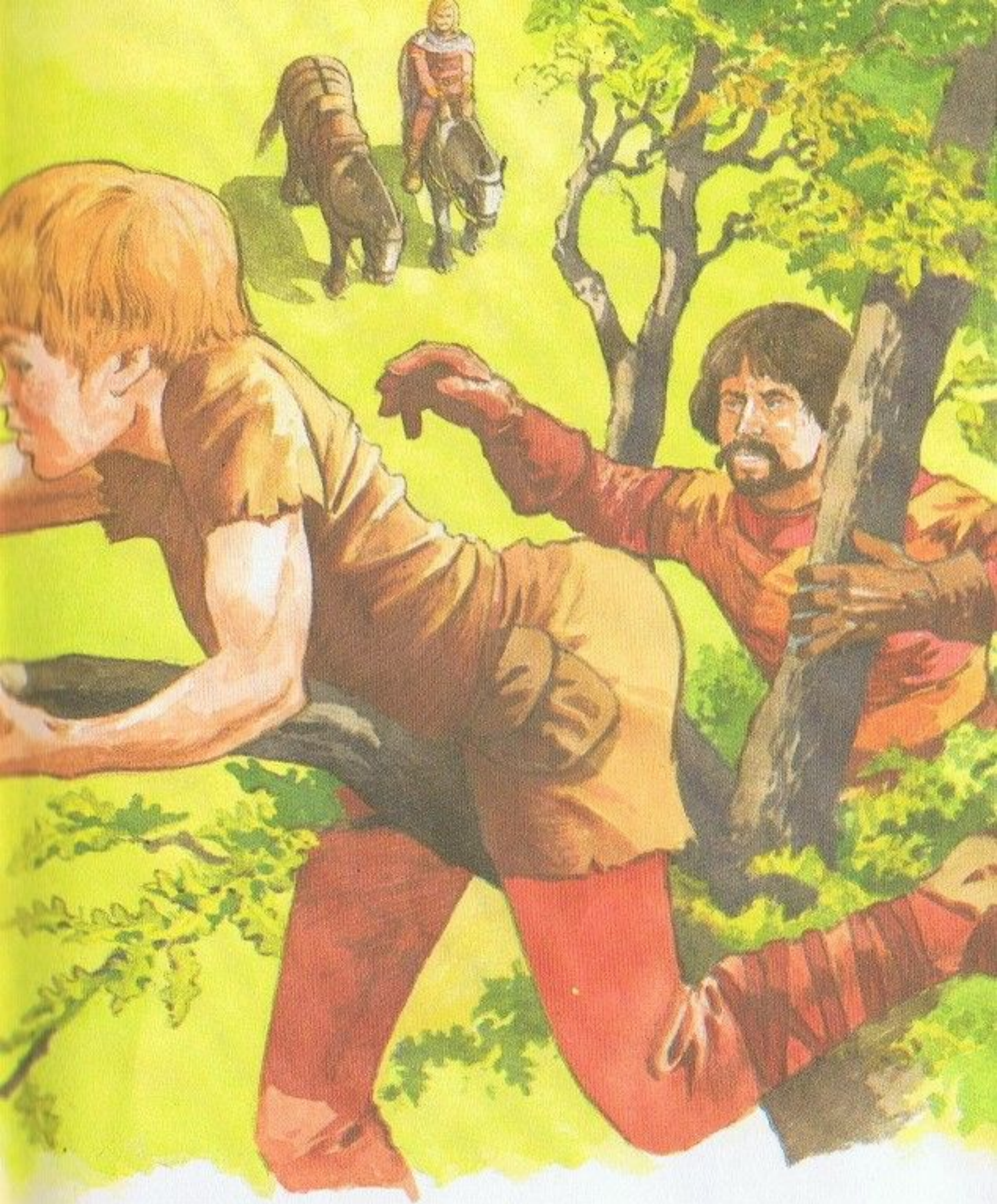






Quickly Bran climbed up the trunk as far as he could go. He wrapped a piece of coarse cloth around his hand to protect it from the falcon's fierce beak. He managed to free the harness straps and to clutch the bird firmly, pinning its wings so that it couldn't fly away.

The falconer climbed up to help him. His hand was protected with a thick leather glove. 'That was lucky! Well done, son!' he grunted. 'This young bird was a present from King Arthur to Sir Lancelot, yonder!'



Bran's eyes opened wide. King Arthur! The brave king who had freed them all from the Saxon invaders. And Sir Lancelot, who had come over from France to help the king. They were two of Bran's heroes!

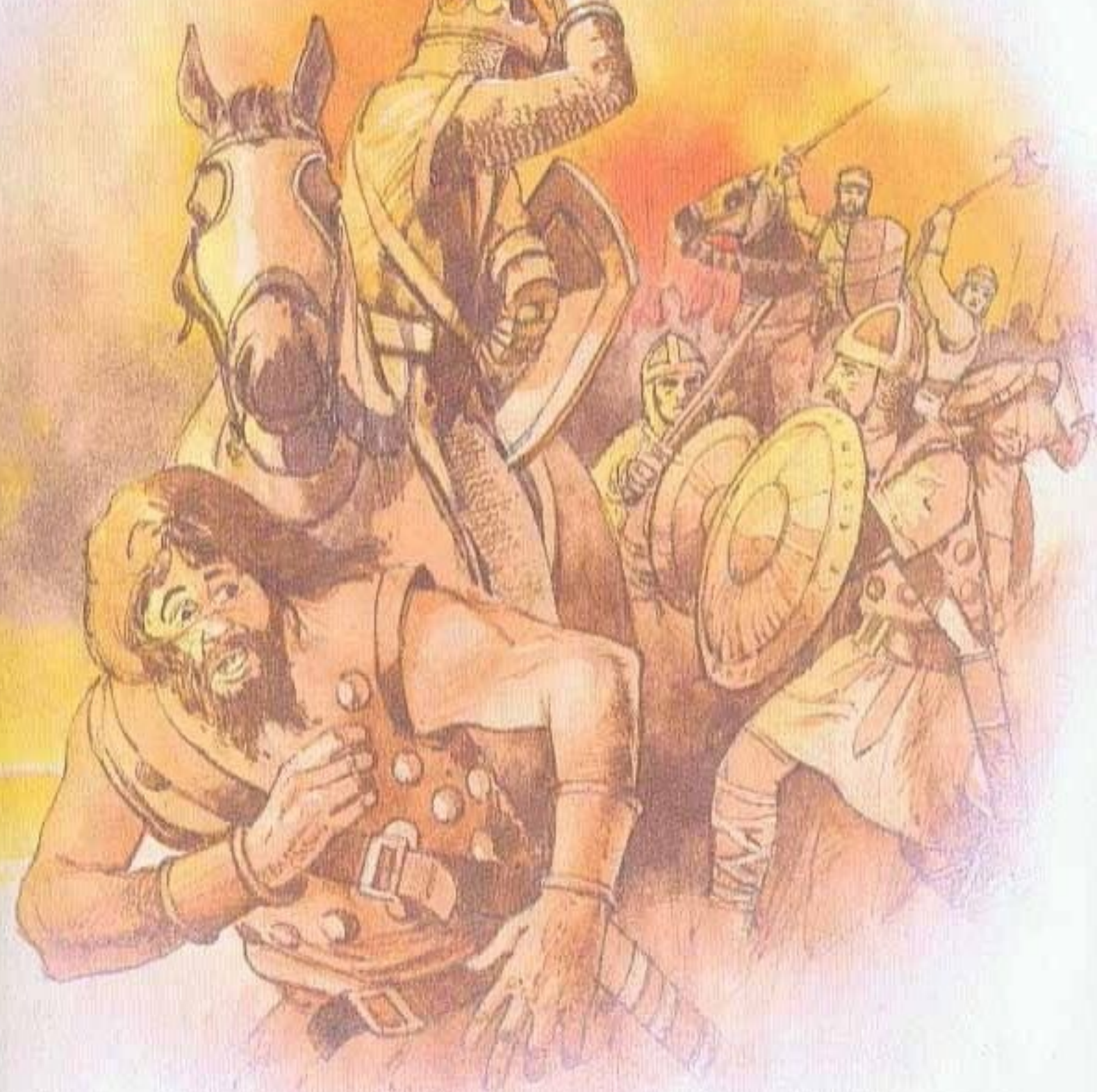


King Arthur and Sir Lancelot

Bran knew all about King Arthur. Arthur had been a boy, a little older than Bran himself, when he had become king. With the help of a magic sword, Arthur had led his men against the fierce Saxon pirates. For seven long years, he had fought against them and finally had beaten them back across the sea.

Then Arthur had set up his court in the ancient Castle of Camelot, up on the hill where Bran stood now. The fair Queen Guinevere and Arthur's best friend, Sir Lancelot, lived there too.





Bran had only ever seen Sir Lancelot at a distance before. Now he looked up at the famous knight, sitting high on his horse. Bran liked Lancelot's strong face and keen eyes.

Sir Lancelot looked down and smiled at the eager boy.

'You're a useful lad! We must find you something to do up at the castle,' he said. 'Bring him back, Gurth, and see that he gets some supper!' Lancelot rode off swiftly up the hill.

'You're in luck, my boy!' said Gurth. 'There's not many gets taken on at the castle!'

'What will I do there?' asked Bran.

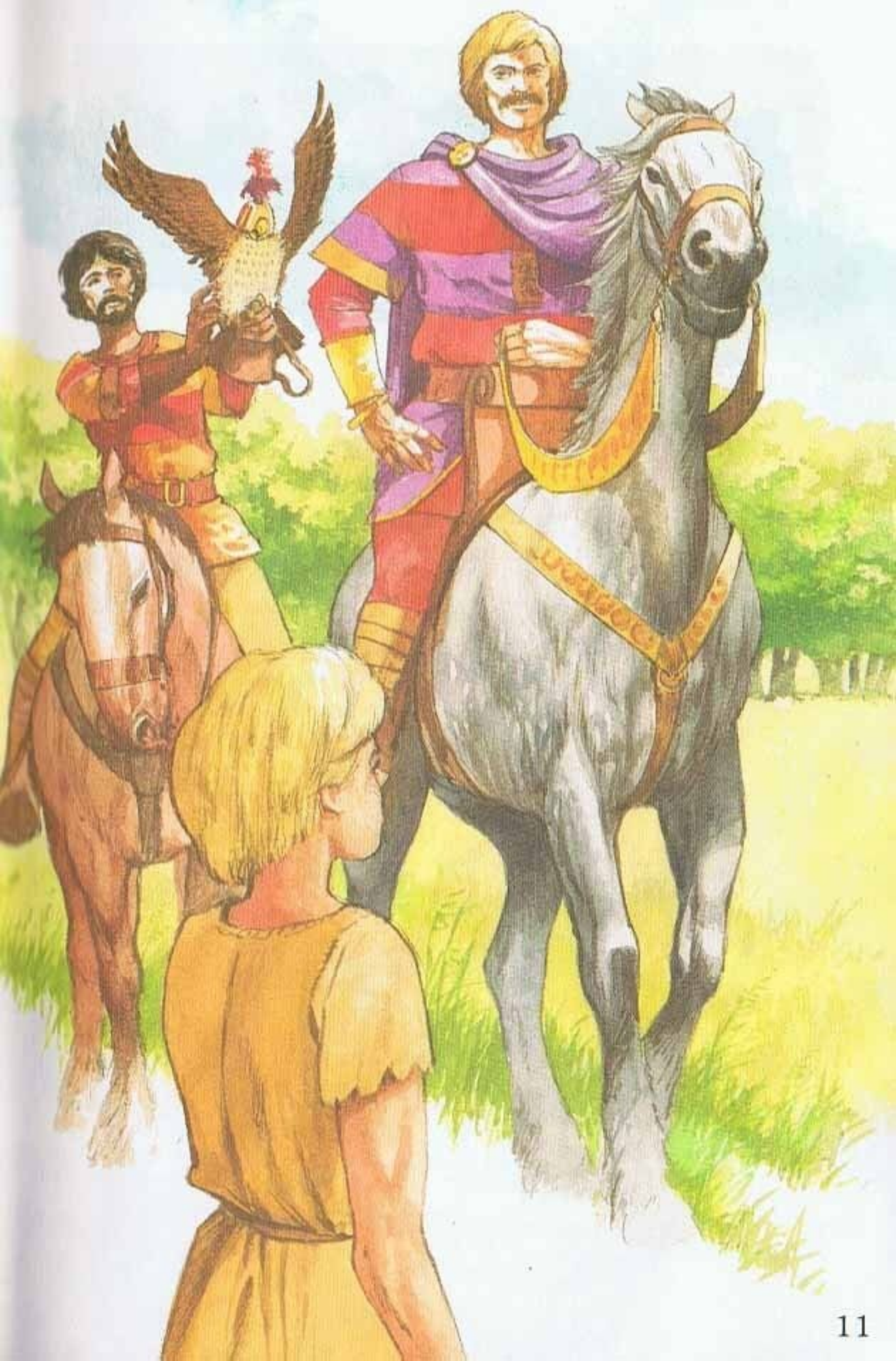
'That's up to Sir Kay!' replied Gurth.

'Why, who's he?' said Bran, anxiously.

'He's the king's steward and is in charge of everything,' said Gurth. 'He and the king were brought up together as boys, somewhere in wild Wales. But to my mind, he's not half the man Sir Lancelot is.'

By this time, the two had climbed to the castle gate. Gurth put the falcon back on its perch in the hawkhouse near the stable.





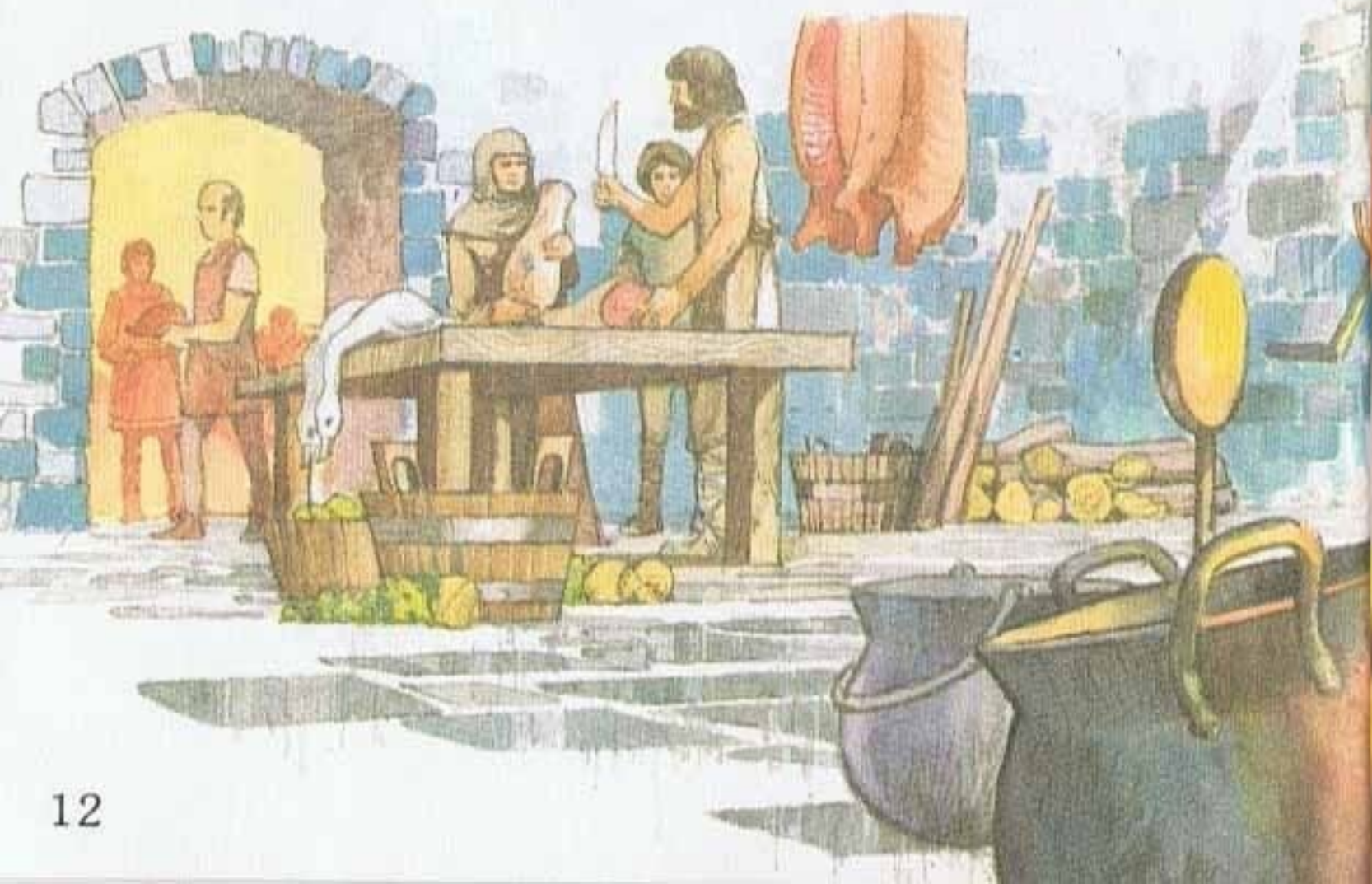


The Great Hall

Gurth took Bran into the kitchen behind the Great Hall. The cook gave him some meat and bread to eat.

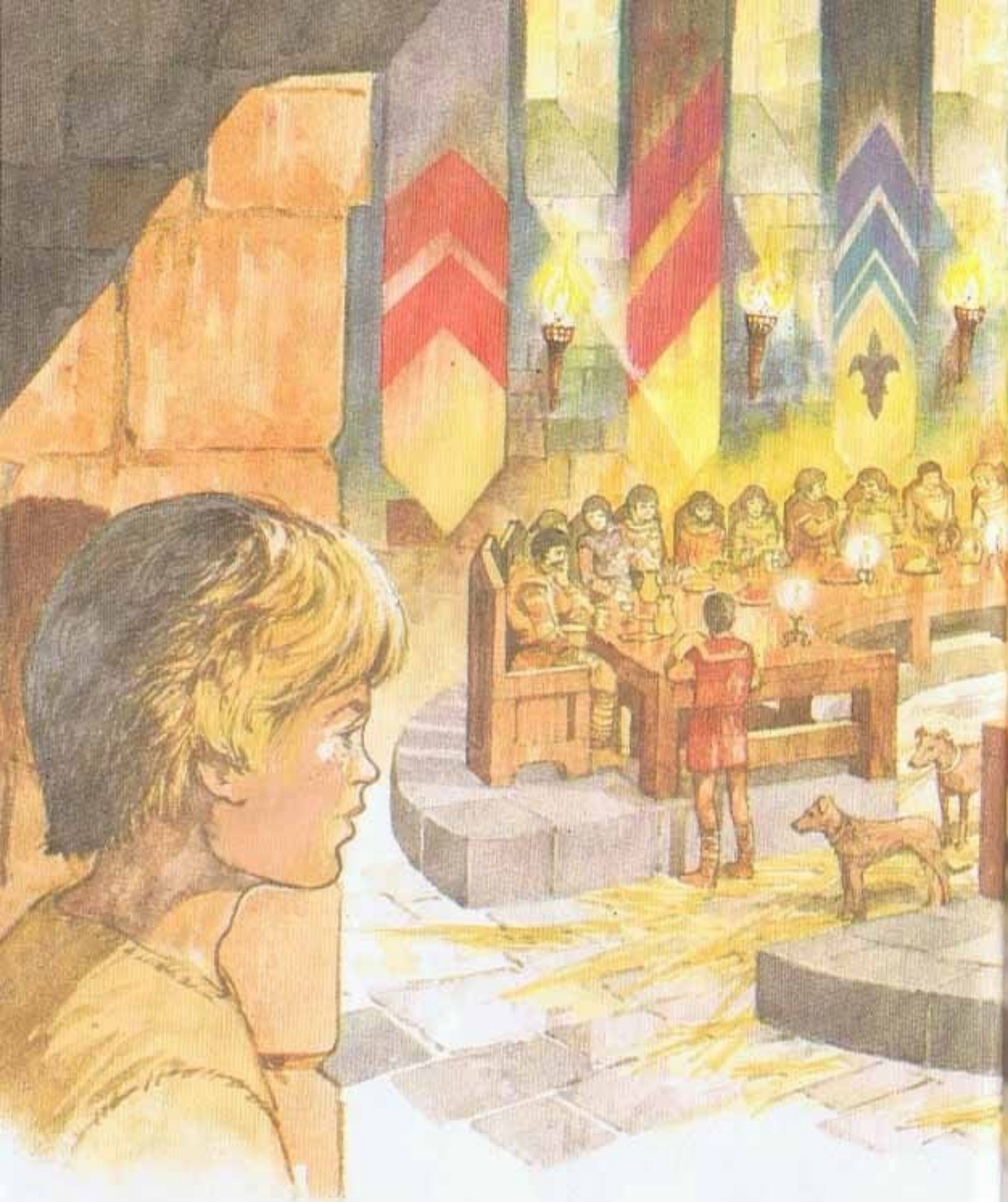
‘Make yourself useful!’ he said, scowling. ‘Go and help the other boy turning the spits!’

There was a row of joints and birds roasting on a spit over an open fire. The fat hissed and spluttered as it fell on the flames. Servants were hurrying to and fro between the kitchen and the hall, carrying great dishes of food and jugs of wine and mead.



One of them saw Bran standing by the fire and hurriedly gave him a tray loaded with bread. Bran took the bread into the hall and handed it to another boy. Then he sneaked into a dark corner so that he could have a good look round. He had never seen anything like this before!





The roof of the hall was so high that he seemed to be in a huge stone cavern. Light came from torches in iron brackets on the walls. The lower parts of the walls were covered with tapestries of animals and hunting scenes. Dogs lurked here and there, waiting for scraps from the table.



In the middle of the hall was a great round table, made of oak. There were many carved chairs around it and each had the name of a knight in letters of gold on the back.

Here King Arthur sat, with Queen Guinevere and Sir Lancelot. The other knights had their own seats except for one chair, which was empty.

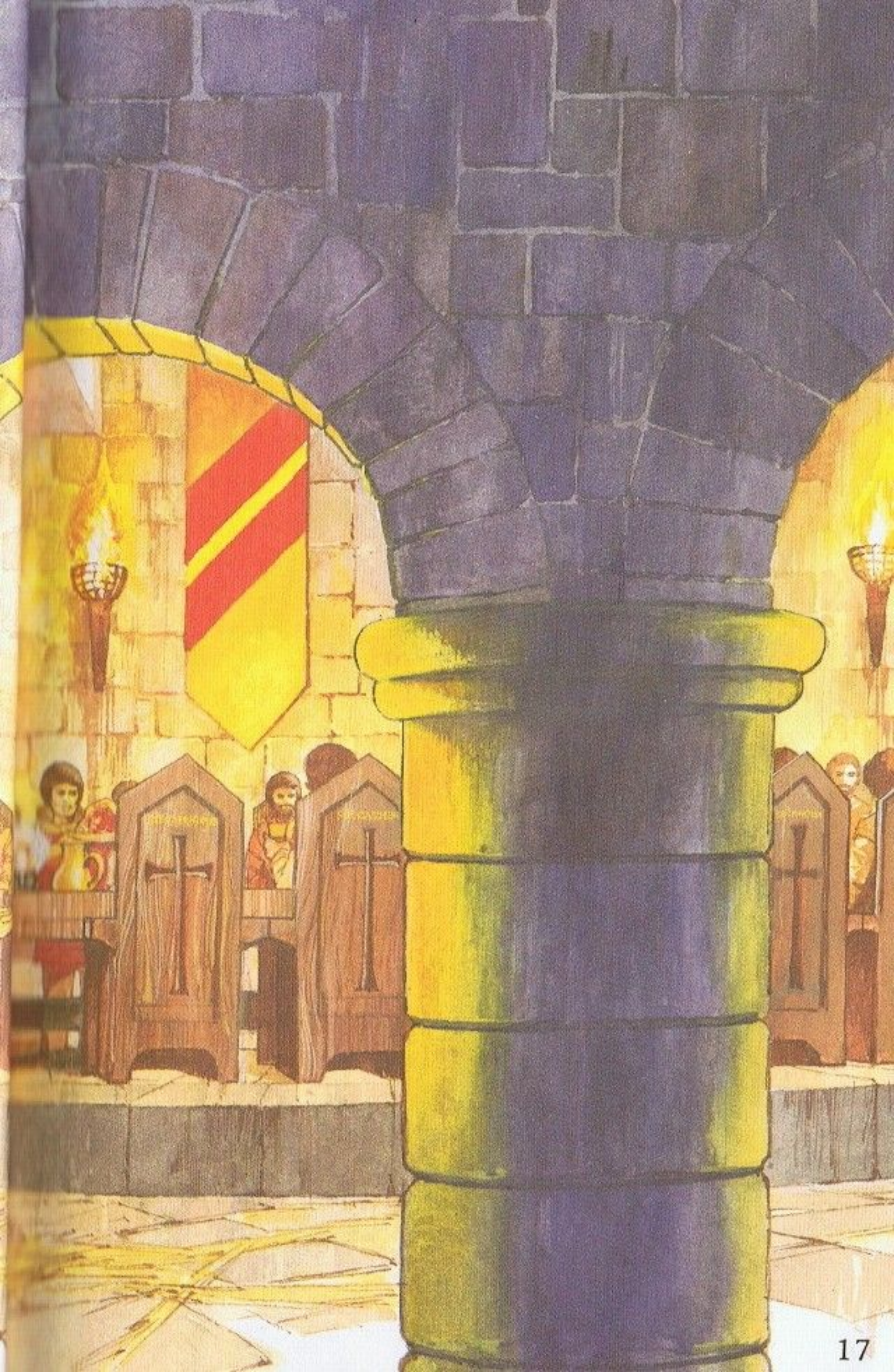
'Who sits there?' whispered Bran to one of the other serving boys.

'That chair is called the *Siege Perilous*!' said the boy. 'It is kept for the perfect knight — one who is not yet born. If the wrong knight sits in it, he will die.'

'Why is the table round?' Bran asked.

'Because the knights used to quarrel about which of them was the most important,' the boy replied. 'King Arthur settled all that with the Round Table. Nobody's seat is above anybody else's, now.'



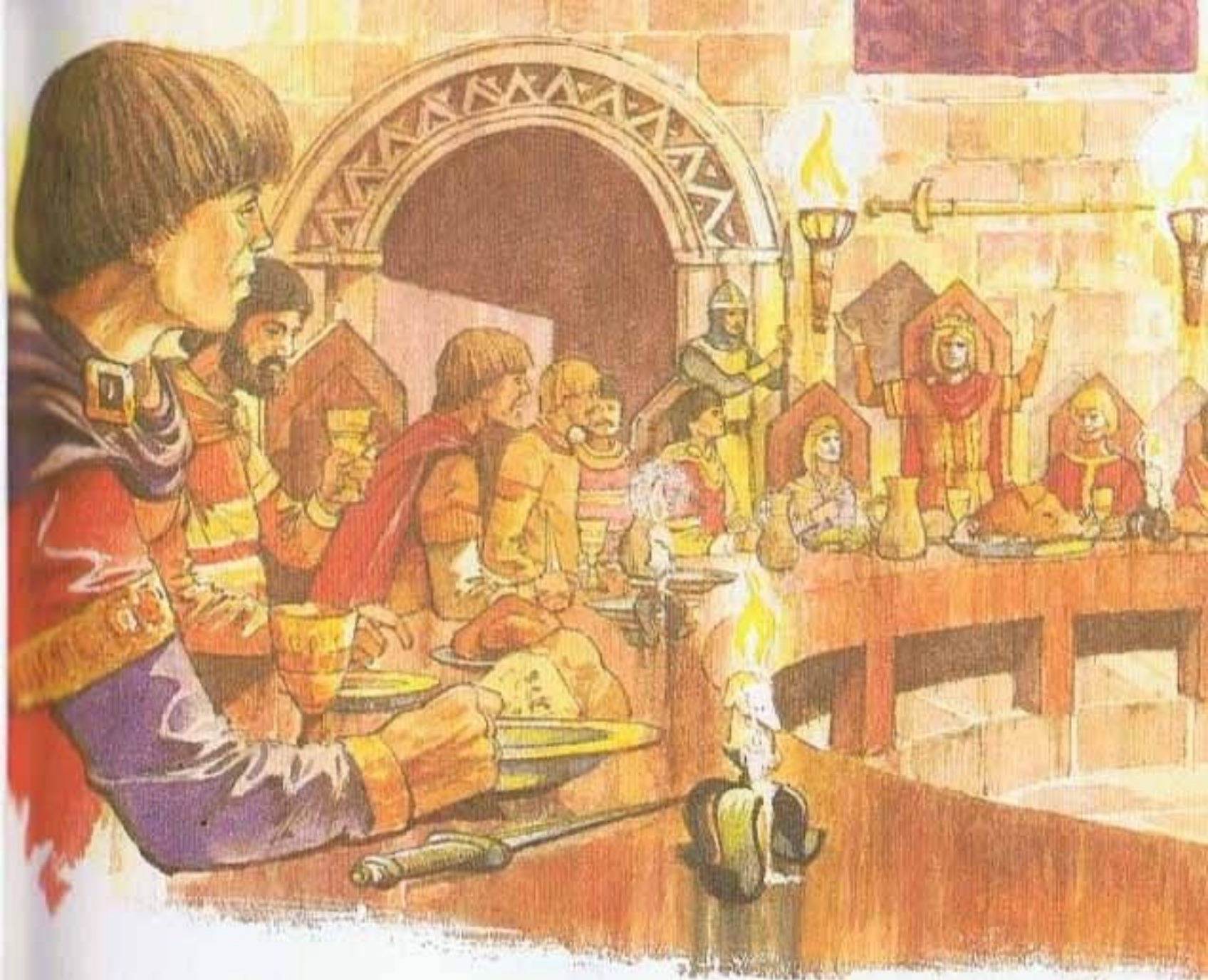




The Knights of the Round Table

Bran gazed at the young king, with his serious face and shining dark eyes. Behind King Arthur, on the wall, hung his famous sword, Excalibur. Excalibur had been given to him by the mysterious Lady of the Lake and it had magical powers. While Arthur carried it into battle he would never be killed. As it hung on the wall the wonderful jewels on the hilt sparkled in the torchlight. King Arthur rose to his feet. Everybody stopped talking.





‘My comrades in arms!’ he said. ‘At this Round Table all knights are equal. Let us promise that anyone who comes here to ask for help will find a champion! The Knights of the Round Table will protect the weak and destroy the enemies of peace in our land.’

The king looked around the huge table. ‘And we will seek the Holy Grail, the cup Christ drank out of at the Last Supper,’ he said. ‘That is the quest of all Christian knights.’

The company of knights joined hands, and swore to be true to King Arthur and the fellowship of the Round Table.



The adventure begins

The next day Sir Lancelot and his young cousin, Sir Lionel, were walking in the castle courtyard.

‘Let us go out and look for an adventure!’ said Sir Lionel, eagerly. ‘You have had so many, cousin Lancelot, and yet nothing exciting has ever happened to me!’

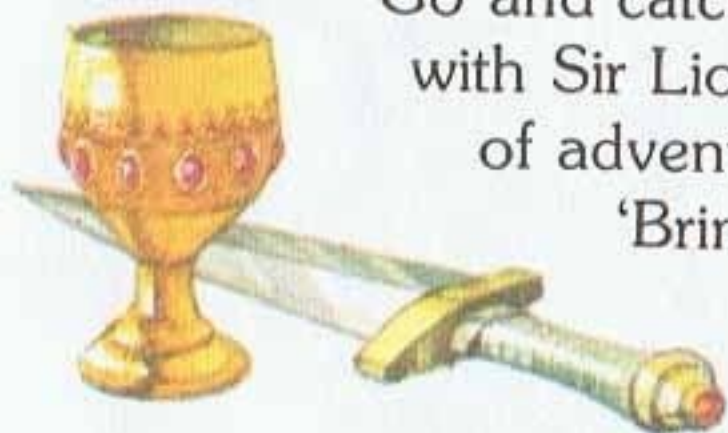
Sir Lancelot laughed. ‘I feel more like lazing in the sunshine than riding out on a quest!’ he said. He looked across the courtyard and saw Bran sitting by the stable door. Sir Kay was busy arranging a tournament and had no time to give Bran his orders.

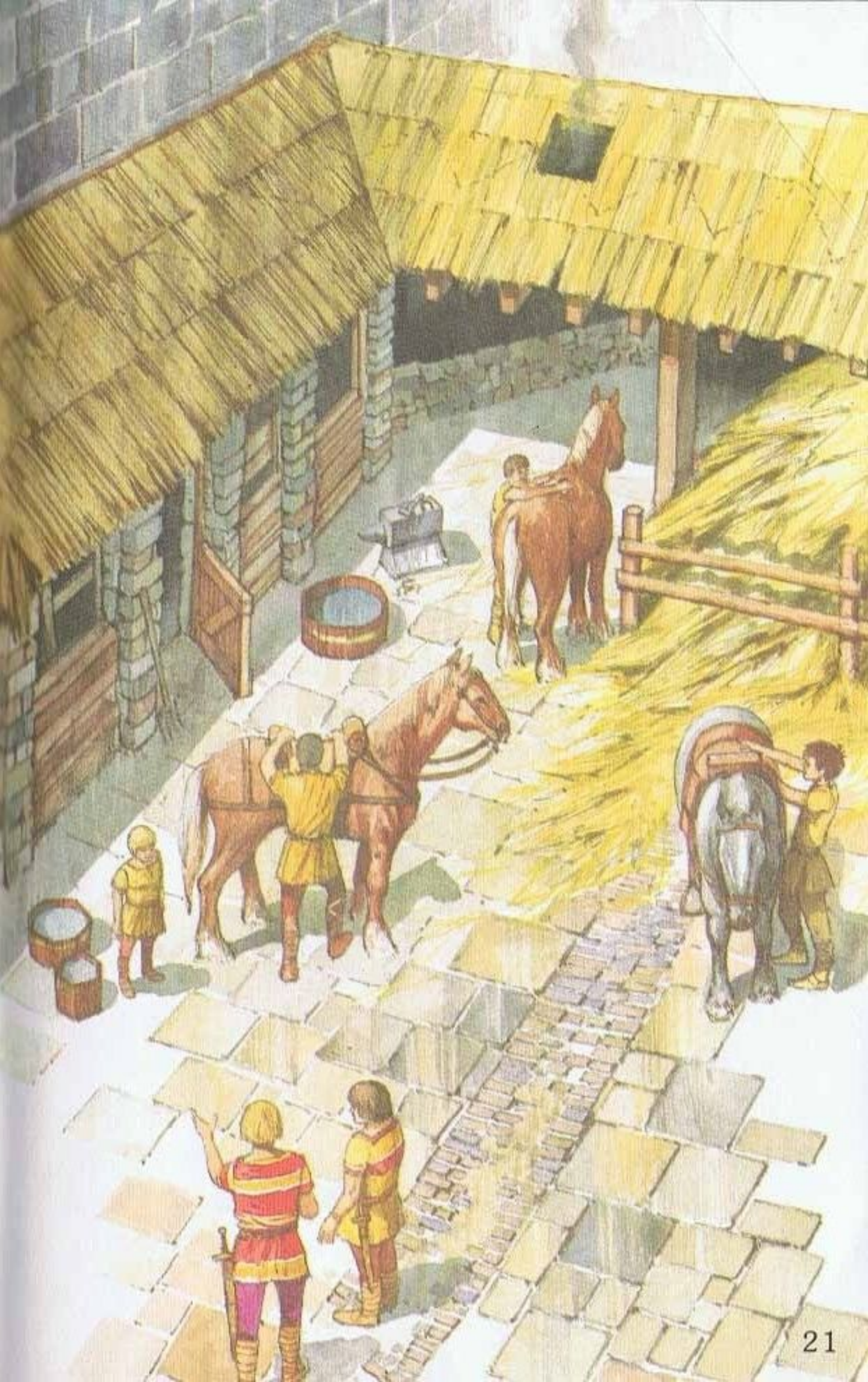
‘Boy! Can you ride a forest pony?’ called Sir Lancelot.

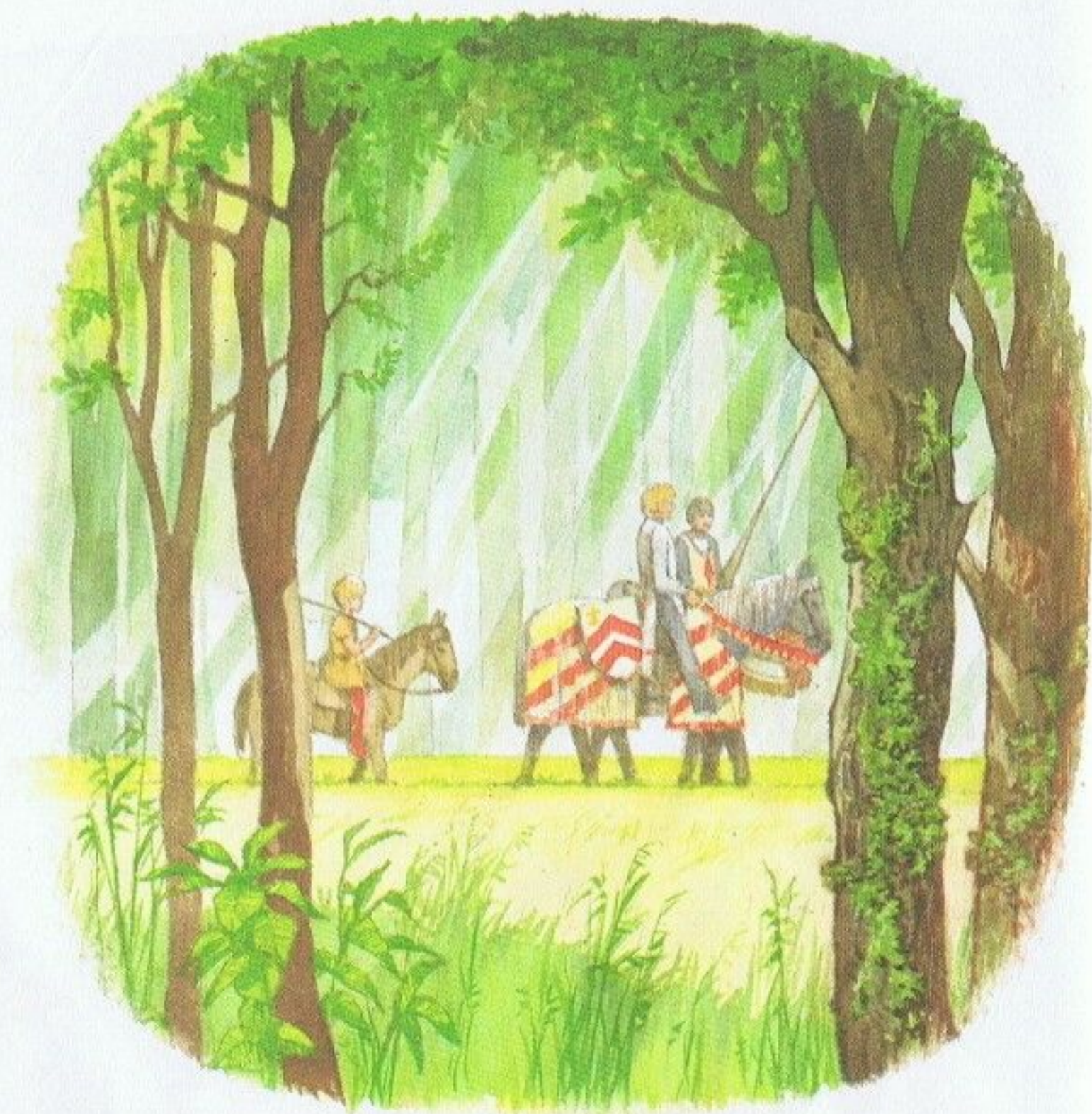
Bran stood up quickly. His eyes sparkled. ‘Yes I can, Sir Lancelot,’ he replied.

‘Go and catch yourself one and come with Sir Lionel and me in search of adventure!’ said the knight.

‘Bring a fishing line. We may need some supper!’



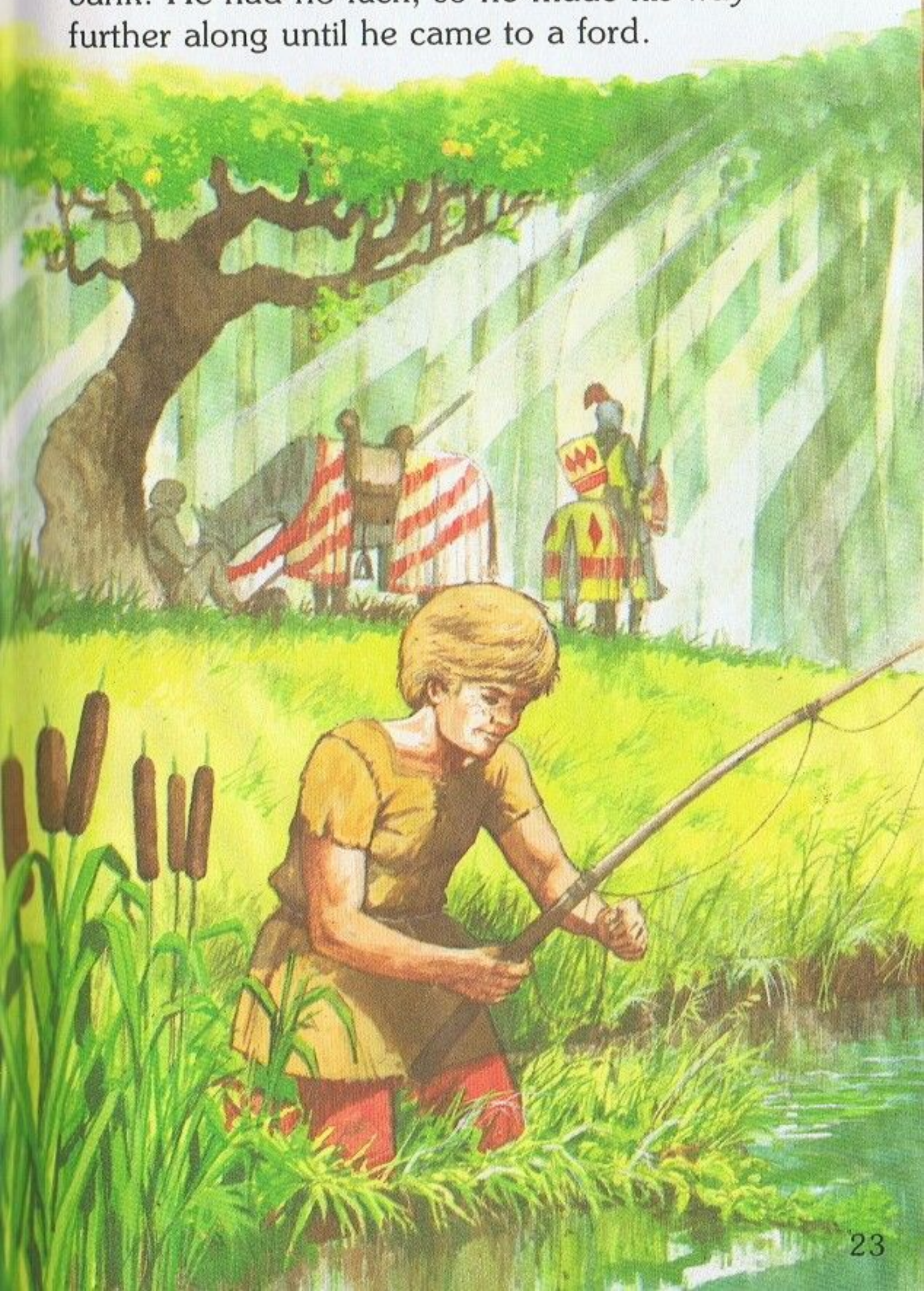




Soon the two knights and Bran were riding through the forest. Bran was excited to be in their company, and listened eagerly to their talk of brave men and great deeds.

At last Sir Lancelot reined in his horse. 'I shall lie down and sleep for a while under this apple tree,' he said. 'You ride on, Sir Lionel, and look for your adventure. You can try your hand at fishing, Bran, down by the river.'

Sir Lionel rode off. Bran went down to the river bank. He had no luck, so he made his way further along until he came to a ford.





The Black Knight's tree

By the river bank, there grew a tall oak tree. Hanging on its branches were the shields of many different knights. From a high branch there hung a copper gong. As Bran looked on and wondered what it could mean, Sir Lionel came riding out of the forest.

He stared at the shields, puzzled. He knew that some of them belonged to brave and true knights. But no knight would give up his shield unless he were taken prisoner – or dead! And where were their owners now? Sir Lionel galloped furiously and struck the gong three times with his lance.







‘Come forth, thou evil knight, that hast done this deed!’ he called. ‘Come forth and answer to me, a Knight of the Round Table!’

Down galloped a huge knight in black armour, from the castle on the other side of the ford.



‘Dost thou dare to challenge me, youngster?’ he bellowed. ‘Prepare thyself for death!’ And he rode into the river.

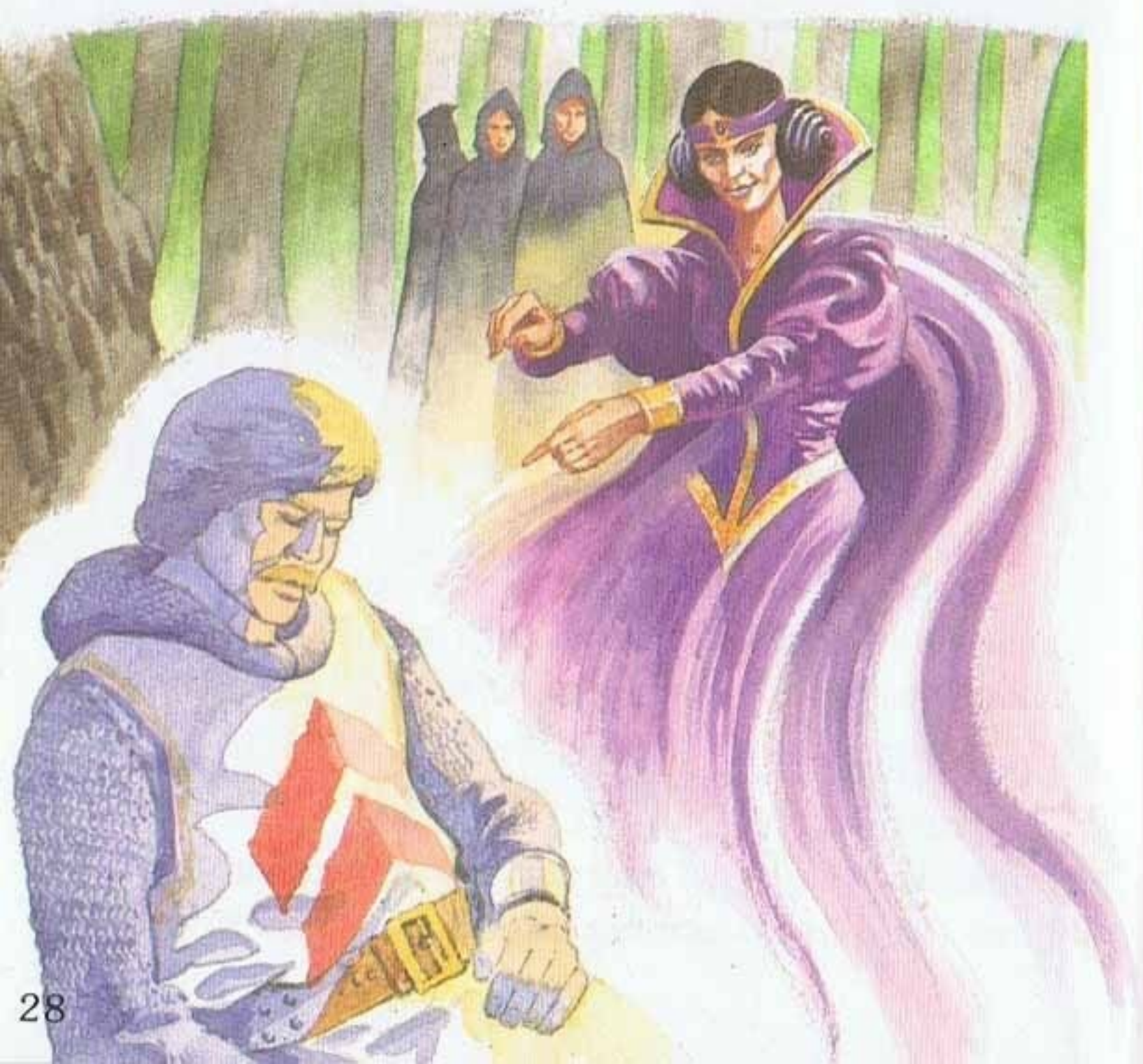
Bran turned and ran back to fetch Sir Lancelot. He reached the apple tree, but Sir Lancelot was gone. Bran looked everywhere and called for him, but there was no answer.



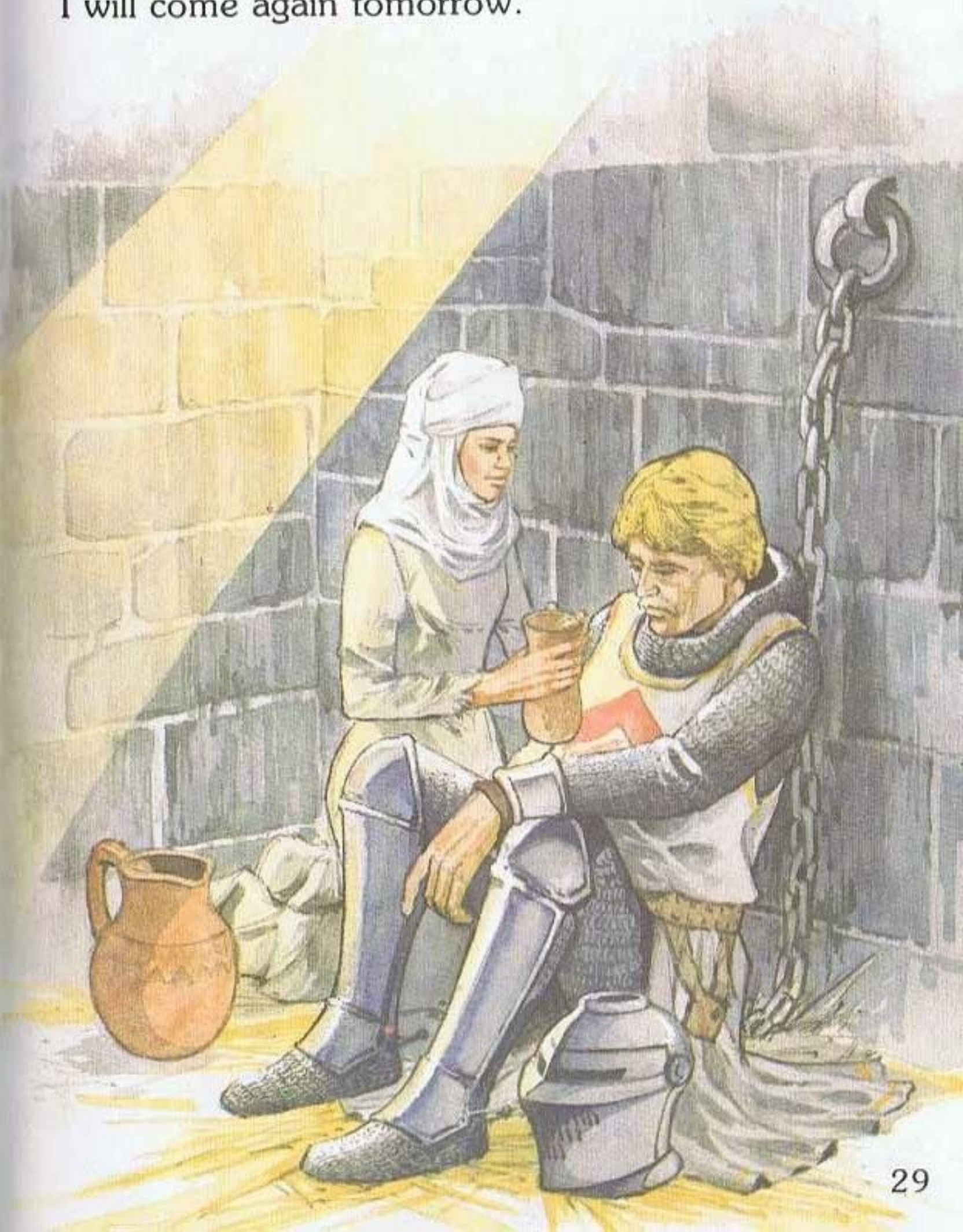
A spell is cast

While Sir Lancelot had been asleep the wicked enchantress, Morgan le Fay, an enemy of King Arthur, had passed that way with her ladies. She had cast a spell on the sleeping knight and had taken him prisoner.

When Sir Lancelot woke from her spell, he found himself in a dungeon, deep within the



castle of Morgan le Fay. A young girl in a ragged dress was bathing his forehead with her scarf. She offered him a drink of water. 'I must go now,' she whispered. 'Be of good cheer... I will come again tomorrow.'



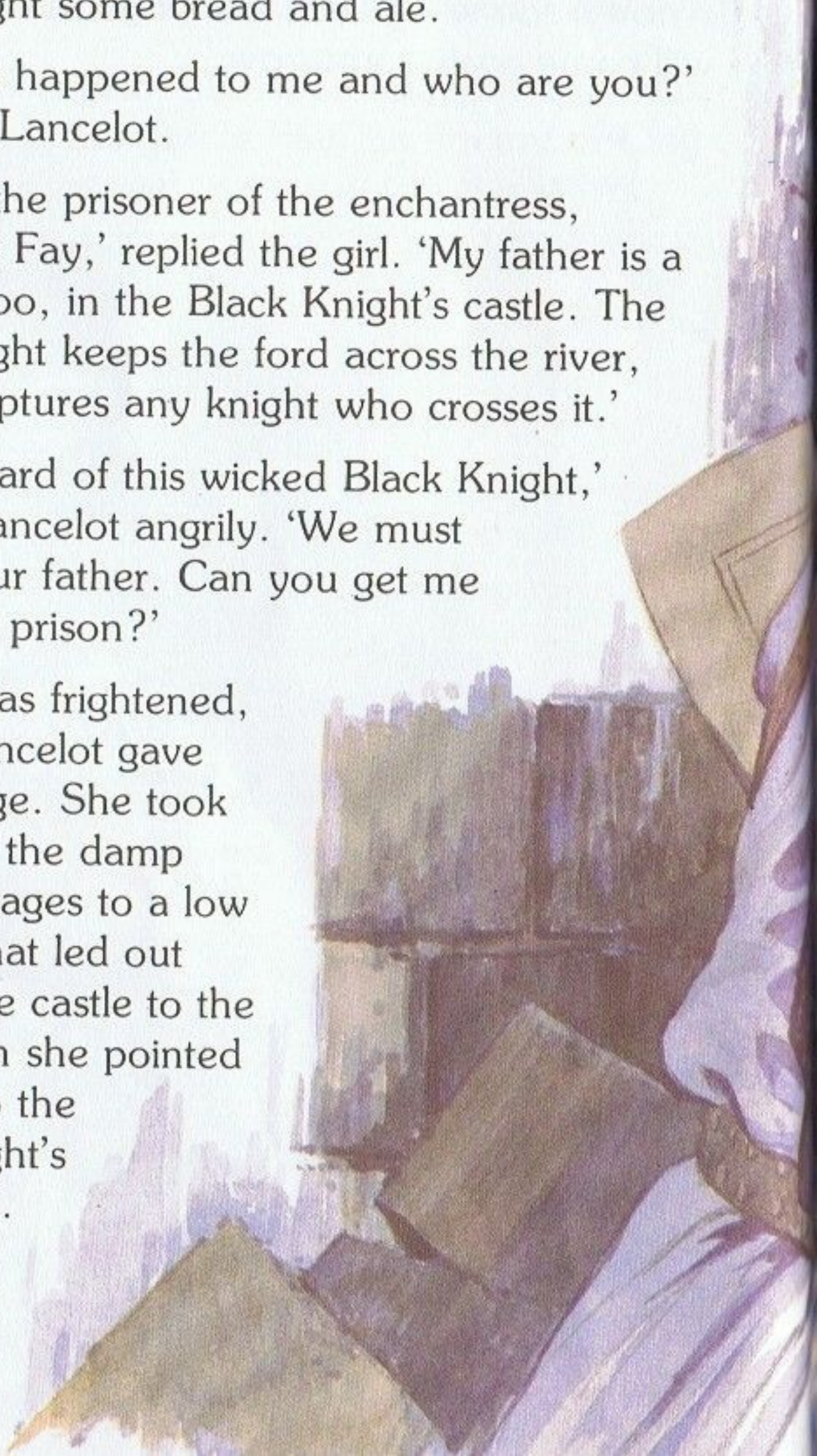
Sir Lancelot spent an uncomfortable night on a bed of dirty straw. He was cold and lonely. Early in the morning, the young girl came again. She brought some bread and ale.

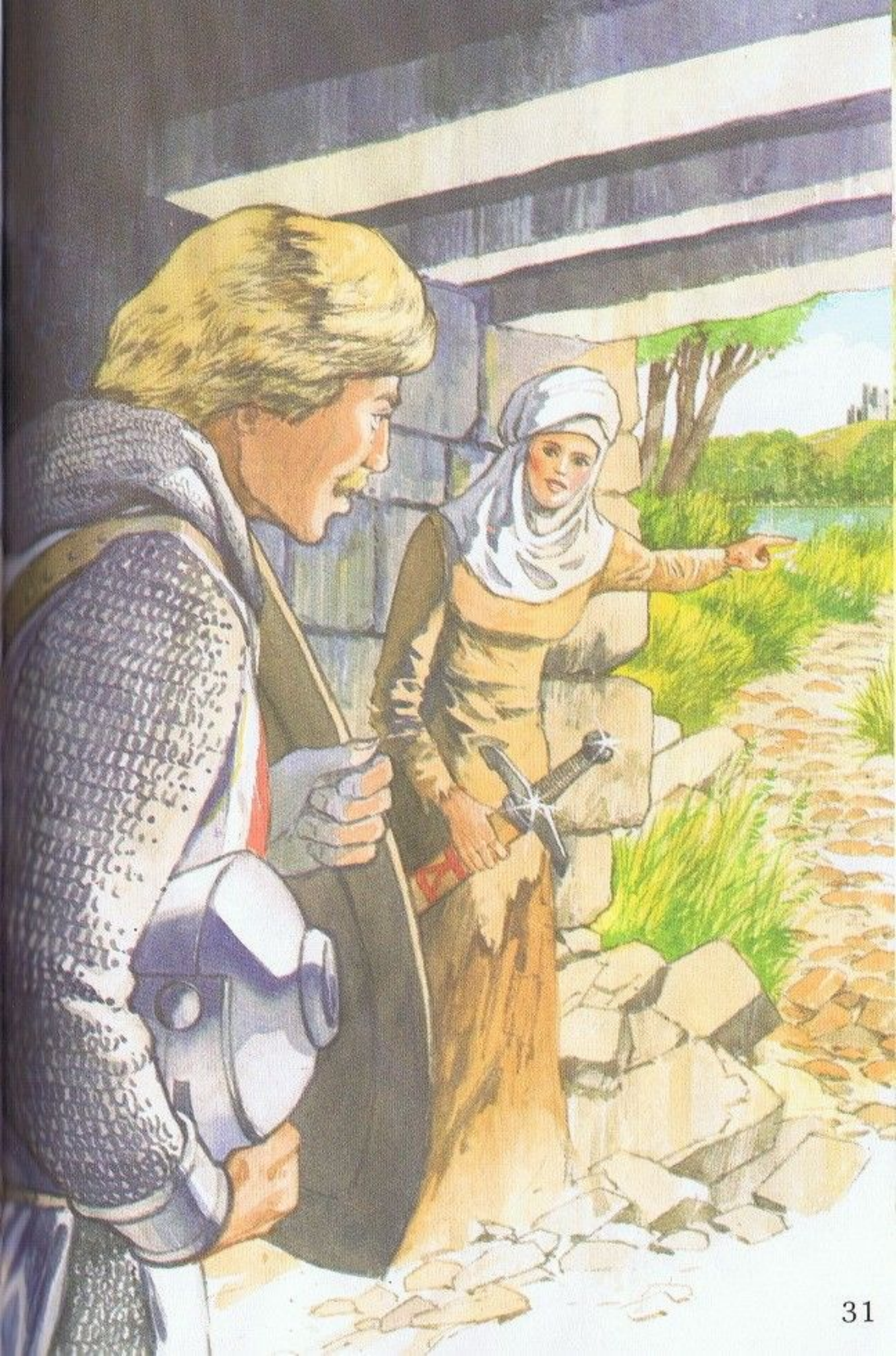
'What has happened to me and who are you?' asked Sir Lancelot.

'You are the prisoner of the enchantress, Morgan le Fay,' replied the girl. 'My father is a prisoner too, in the Black Knight's castle. The Black Knight keeps the ford across the river, and he captures any knight who crosses it.'

'I have heard of this wicked Black Knight,' said Sir Lancelot angrily. 'We must rescue your father. Can you get me out of this prison?'

The girl was frightened, but Sir Lancelot gave her courage. She took him along the damp stone passages to a low opening that led out beyond the castle to the river. Then she pointed the way to the Black Knight's stronghold.







Sir Lancelot to the rescue

Sir Lancelot and the girl found their way to the ford, and the oak tree. When he saw the crests on the shields, Lancelot knew that they were the shields of other Knights of the Round Table. Then he saw Sir Lionel's shield on the tree and he knew that his cousin must also have been captured by the Black Knight.





Lancelot struck the gong, and the Black Knight came charging down to the river bank.

‘Who art thou,’ challenged Sir Lancelot, ‘that hast taken these Knights of the Round Table prisoner and hung their shields on this evil tree?’

‘I am the Black Knight,’ answered his enemy. ‘One of King Arthur’s knights has killed my brother. I have sworn to take revenge.’



‘Prepare thyself,’ cried Sir Lancelot, ‘for one of us must die!’ They fought ferociously on foot, in and out of the water. Their swords clashed on their shields and helmets, and sparks flew.

They fought for two hours without stopping, till at last the Black Knight cried, ‘You are the best fighter I have ever met! I will free my prisoners, unless you are the knight that I hate most – the one who killed Sir Carados, my brother!’



'I am he!' cried Sir Lancelot, boldly. 'So be on your guard again!'

They fought again. The Black Knight began to tire. He dropped his shield and, with a mighty blow, Sir Lancelot cut off his head.

Sir Lancelot sent the young girl to free her father and all the other prisoners. Then, dazed and wounded, he wandered off into the forest.



The hermit in the forest

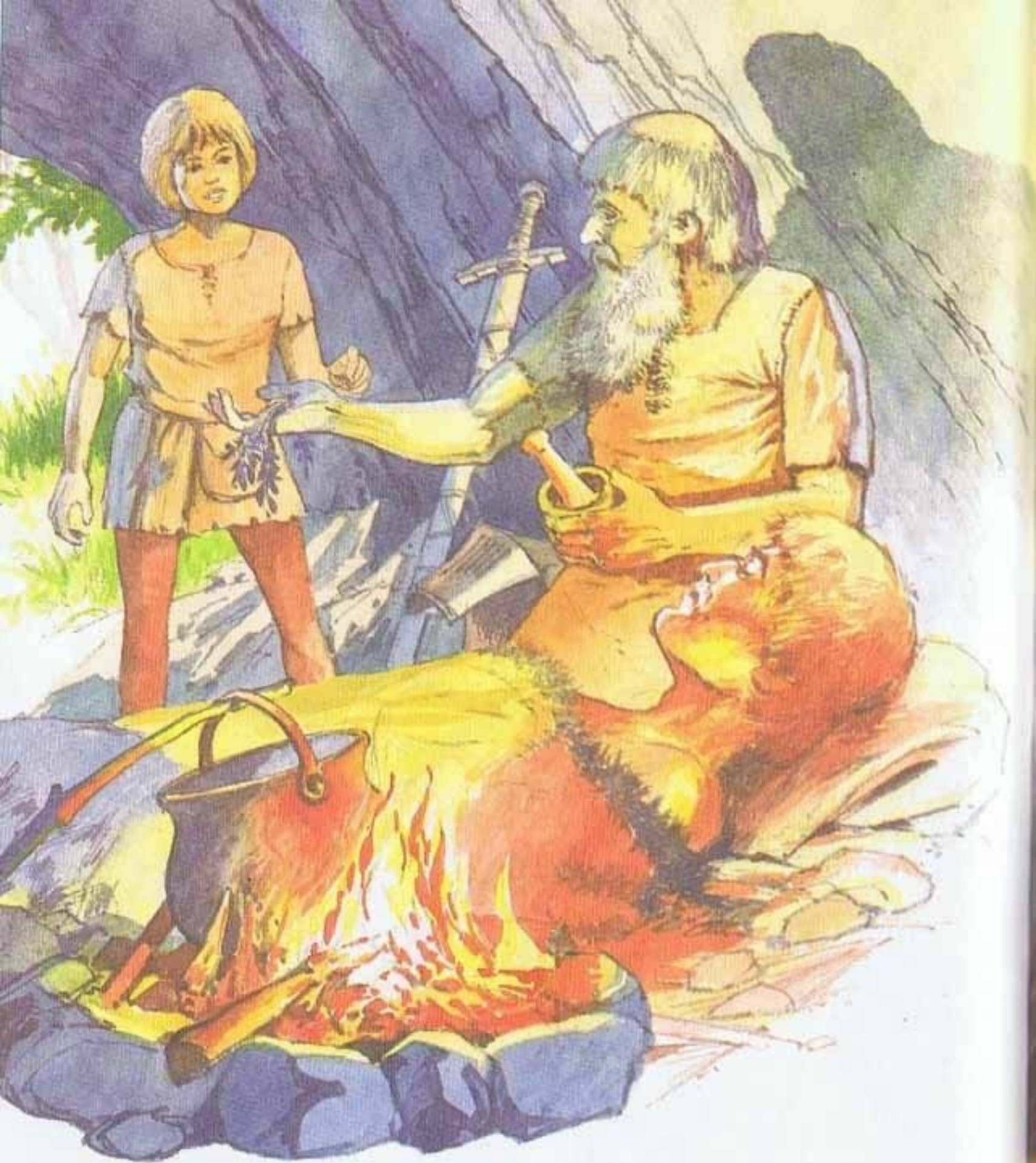
Bran was still searching the forest for the missing Sir Lancelot. He did not know about Morgan le Fay or the fight at the ford. The next morning, when it was light, he went back to the oak tree and the shields were gone. There were the marks of many horses' hooves on the muddy river bank. Bran was puzzled.

He returned to the forest once more to search for Sir Lancelot and stopped in a clearing to listen. He could hear someone struggling in the bushes.



To his horror he saw Sir Lancelot, badly hurt and bleeding. Bran ran to him and half-carried him into the clearing. As the boy bent over the wounded knight, wondering what to do, an old hermit who lived in a nearby cave came up to them. Between the two of them, they dragged Sir Lancelot into the shelter of the cave.



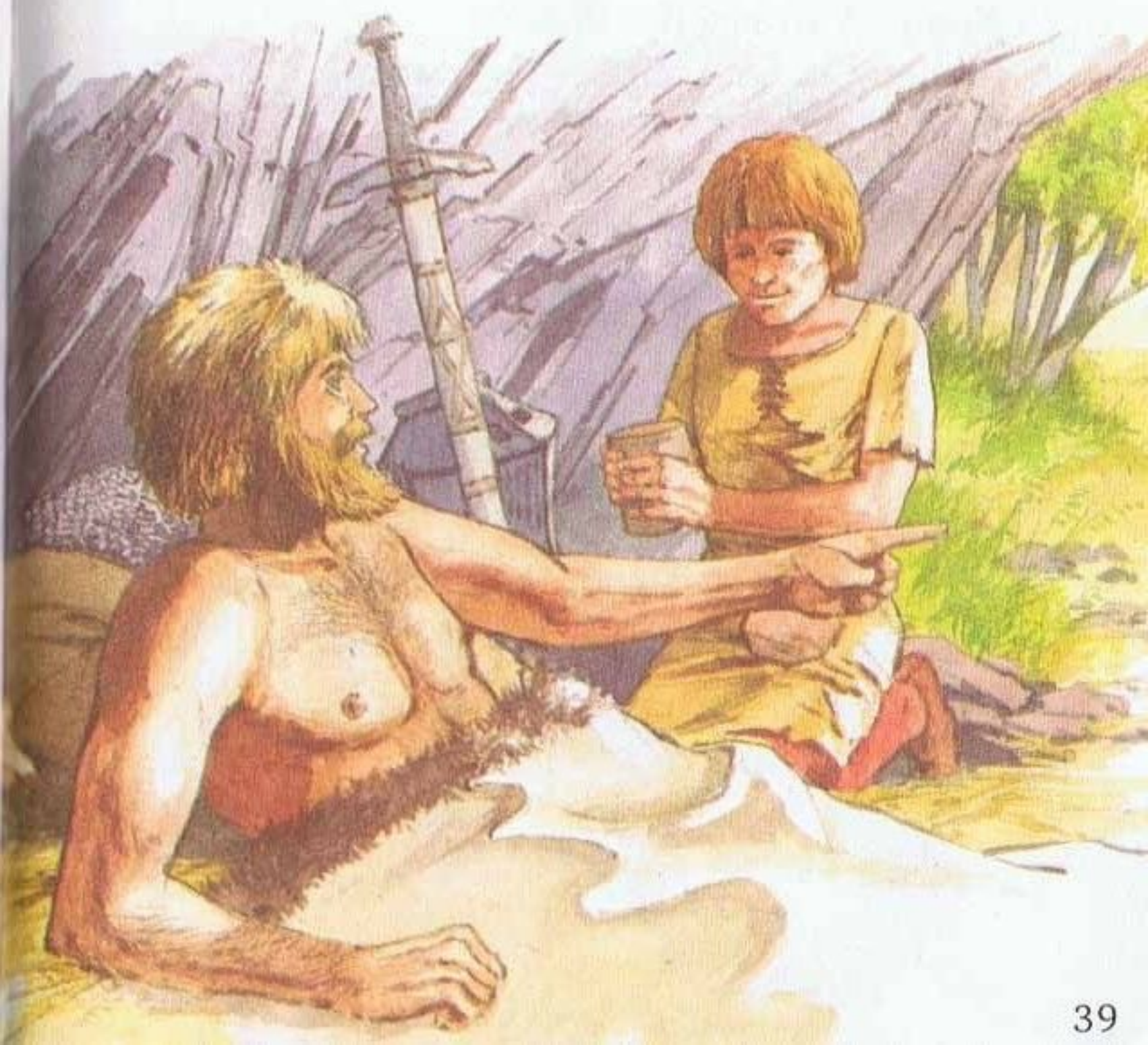


'Go! Search for some more of these herbs, boy!' said the old hermit, showing some plants to Bran. Bran searched the forest and brought back what he could find. The hermit bathed Sir Lancelot's wounds and gave him healing drinks made from herbs and spices.

Bran watched over Sir Lancelot, who did not know him, but cried out as if he were dreaming and still fighting his enemy, the Black Knight.

As time went by, the leaves turned brown and fell to the ground. A long cold winter set in and still Sir Lancelot lay in the hermit's cave. Then in spring, when green buds burst on the branches, Sir Lancelot opened his eyes. He had regained his strength and he knew who Bran was.

'Take me to Camelot, boy!' he cried.

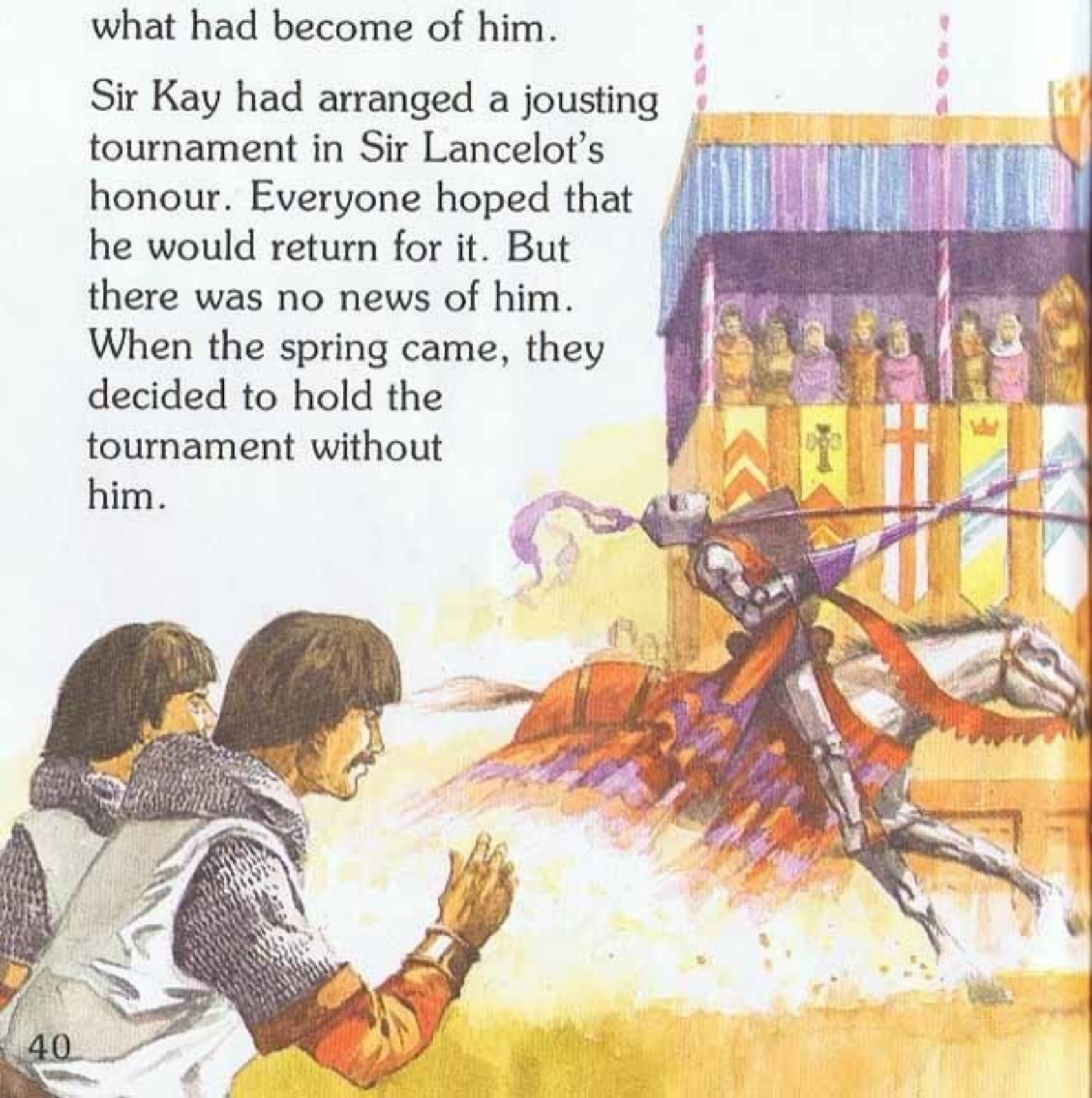




In Camelot

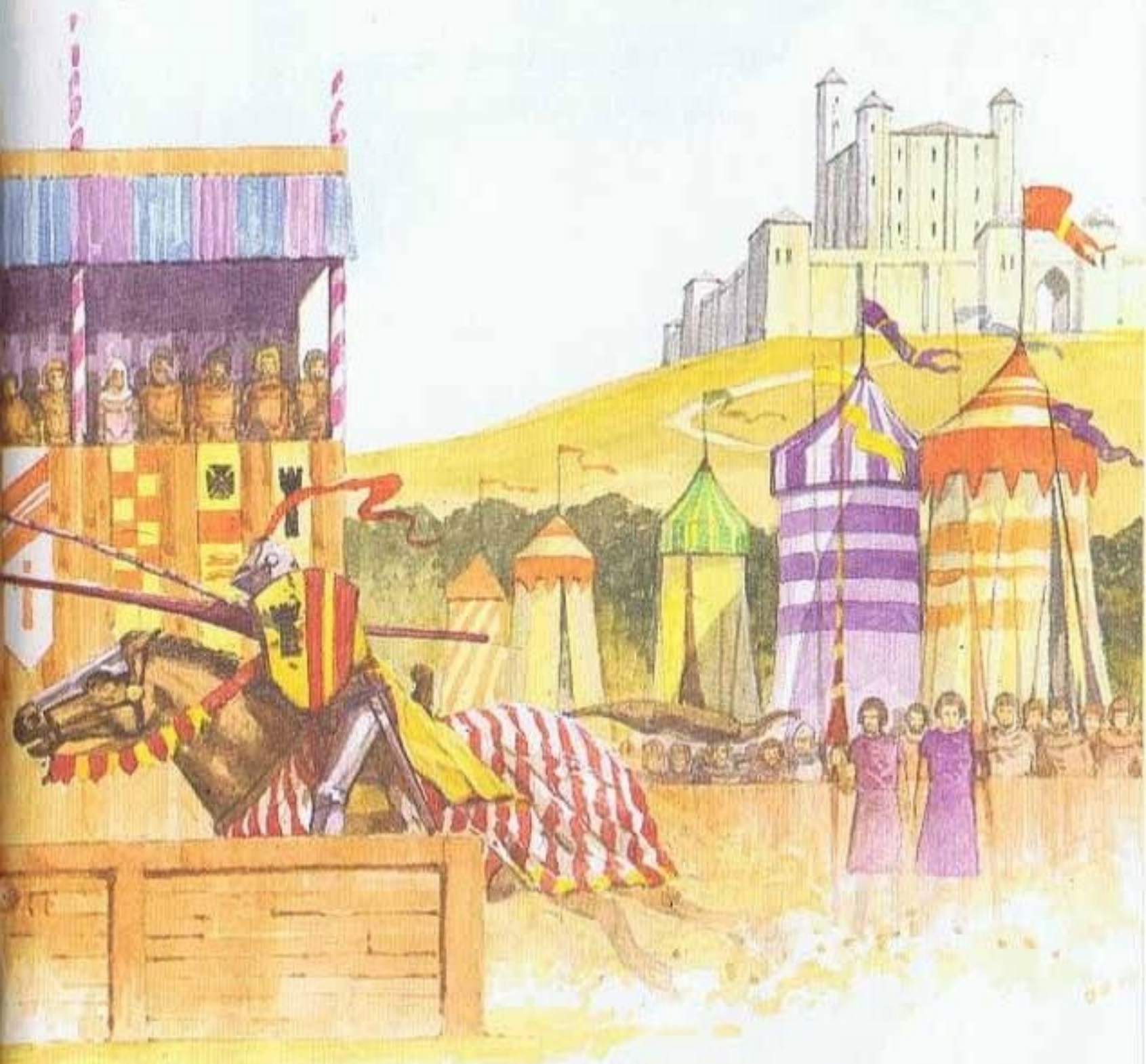
Sir Lionel and the other knights who had been freed from the Black Knight's castle had returned to Camelot a long time before, without Sir Lancelot. They had gone back to the forest many times to search for him but always returned alone. No one knew what had become of him.

Sir Kay had arranged a jousting tournament in Sir Lancelot's honour. Everyone hoped that he would return for it. But there was no news of him. When the spring came, they decided to hold the tournament without him.



All the lords and ladies gathered in the high seats overlooking the arena. King Arthur and Queen Guinevere were there.

The knights rode against each other in single combat. Their spears shattered to pieces as they clashed and, one after another, they fell from their horses. At last only six champions remained. They were to fight it out between them.

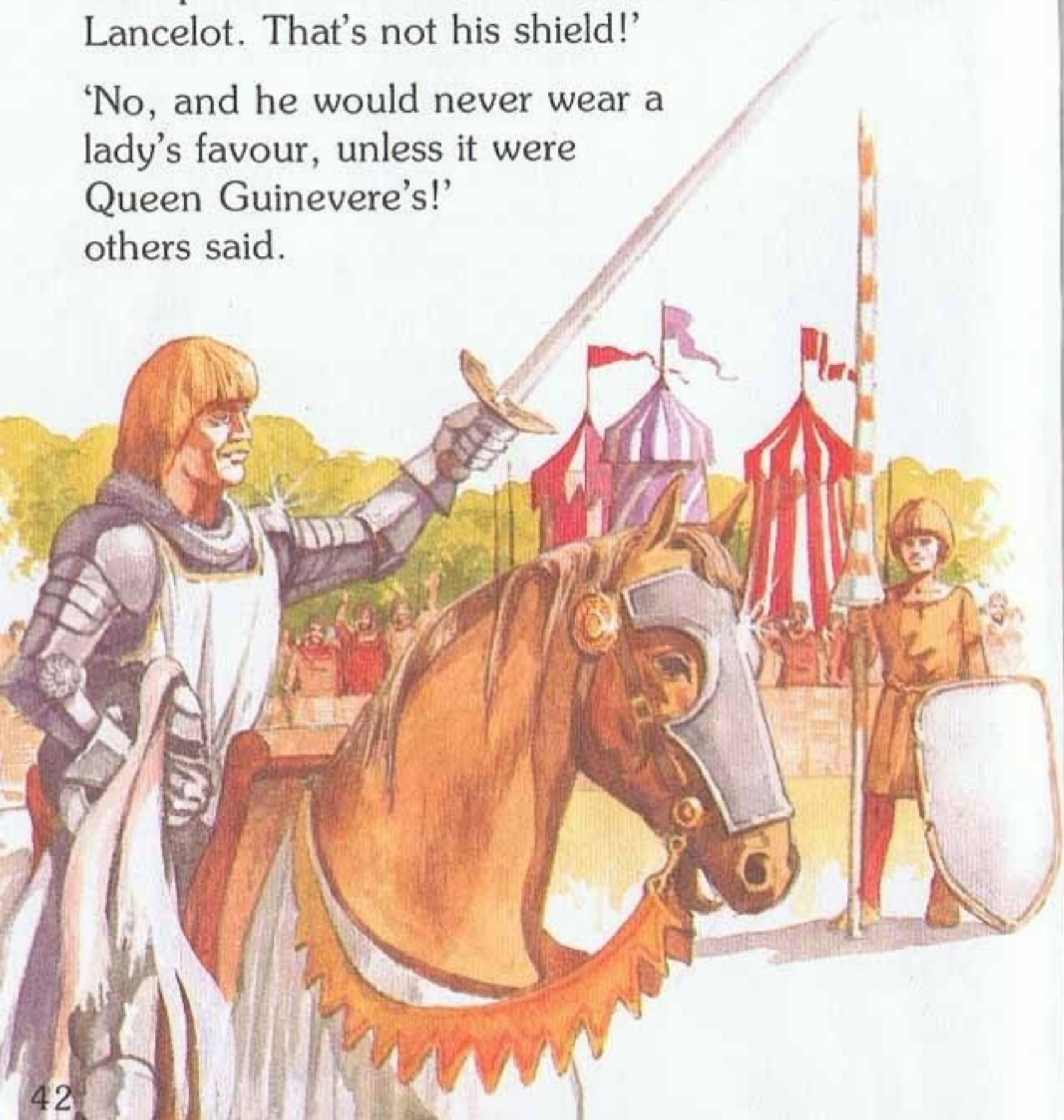


Then a silver trumpet sounded. A strange knight with a white shield rode into the arena and challenged all six champions to single combat.

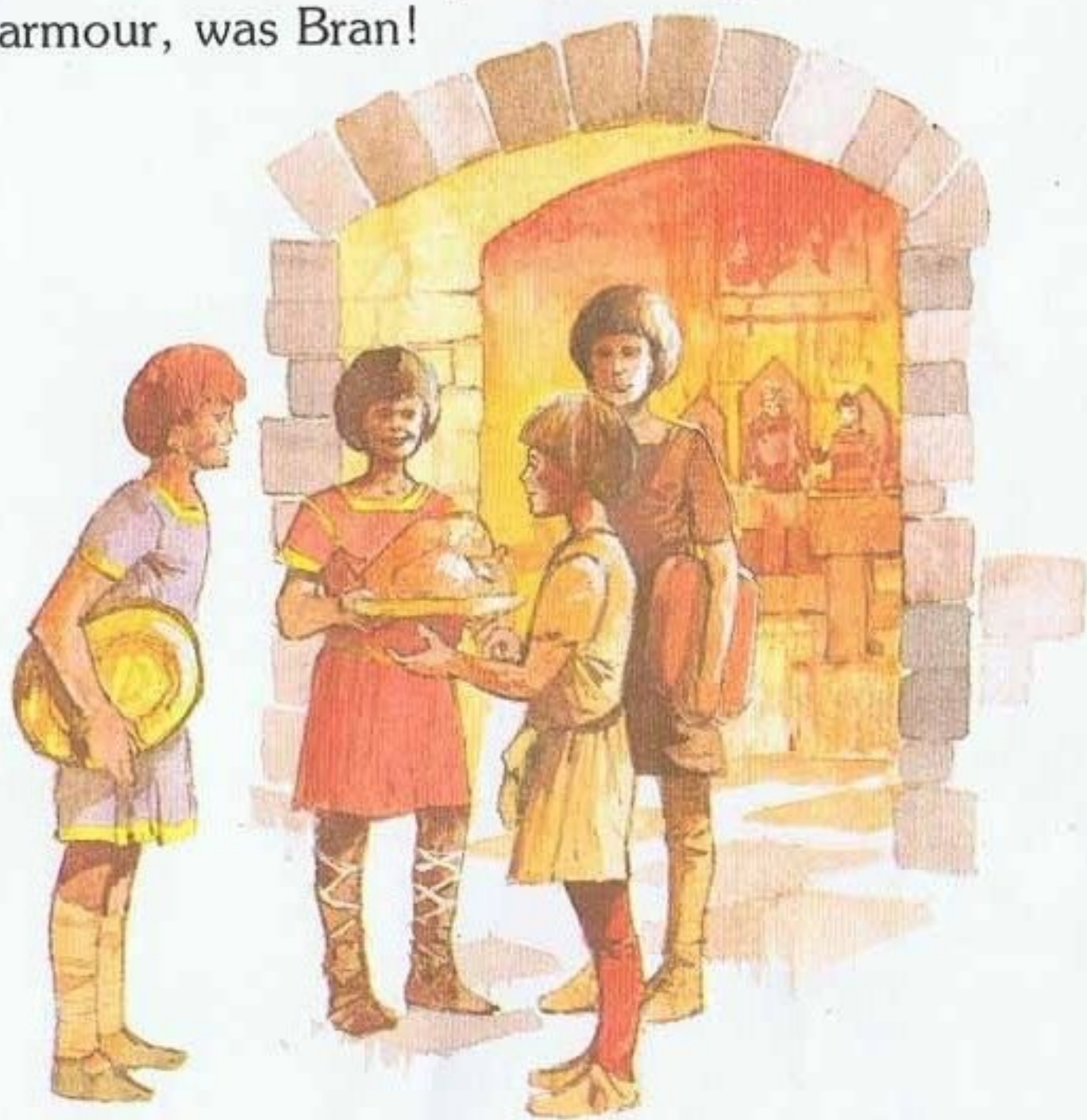
One by one, the stranger beat them! No one knew who he was. He wore a tattered scarf on his helmet – a lady's favour.

'Only Lancelot could have beaten so many champions!' muttered the crowd. 'But it can't be Lancelot. That's not his shield!'

'No, and he would never wear a lady's favour, unless it were Queen Guinevere's!' others said.



Then the stranger took off his helmet, and shook his golden hair, laughing. It was Sir Lancelot. And the tattered scarf he carried belonged to the young girl who had rescued him from the castle of the enchantress. And the boy, who stood some way off, holding Sir Lancelot's armour, was Bran!



That night there was a splendid banquet in the Great Hall. Bran had a marvellous time telling all the kitchen boys about his adventure. He knew that he and the mighty Sir Lancelot would always be special friends.

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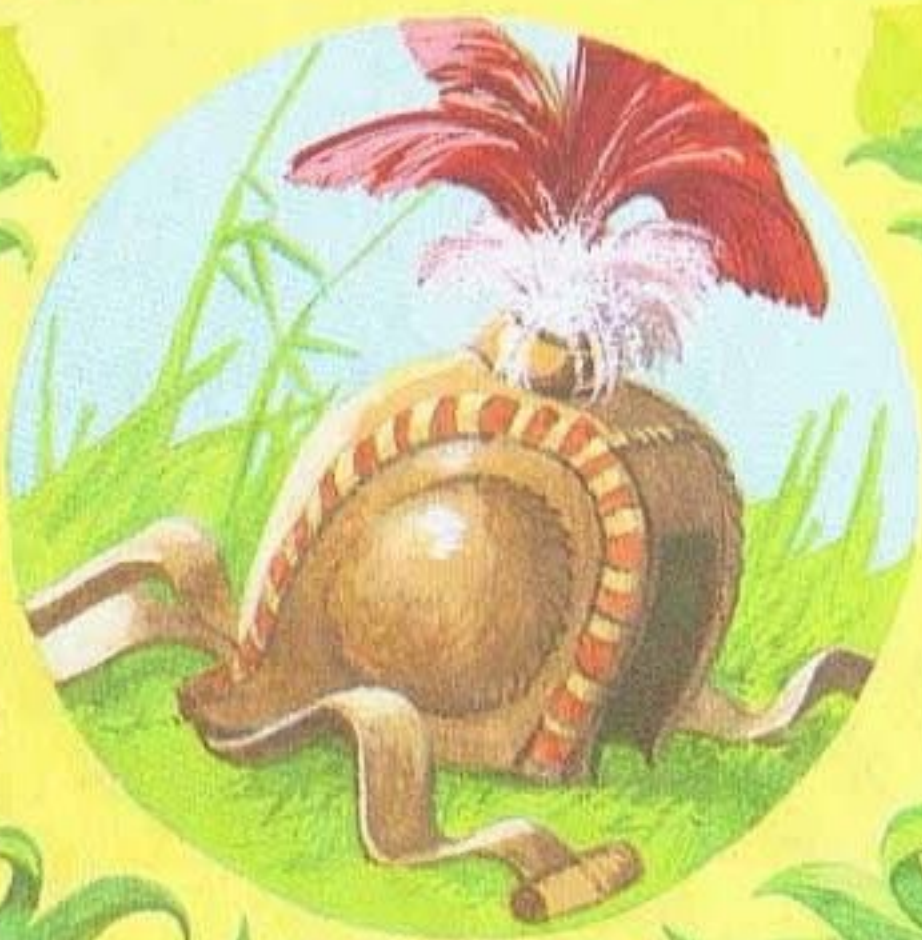
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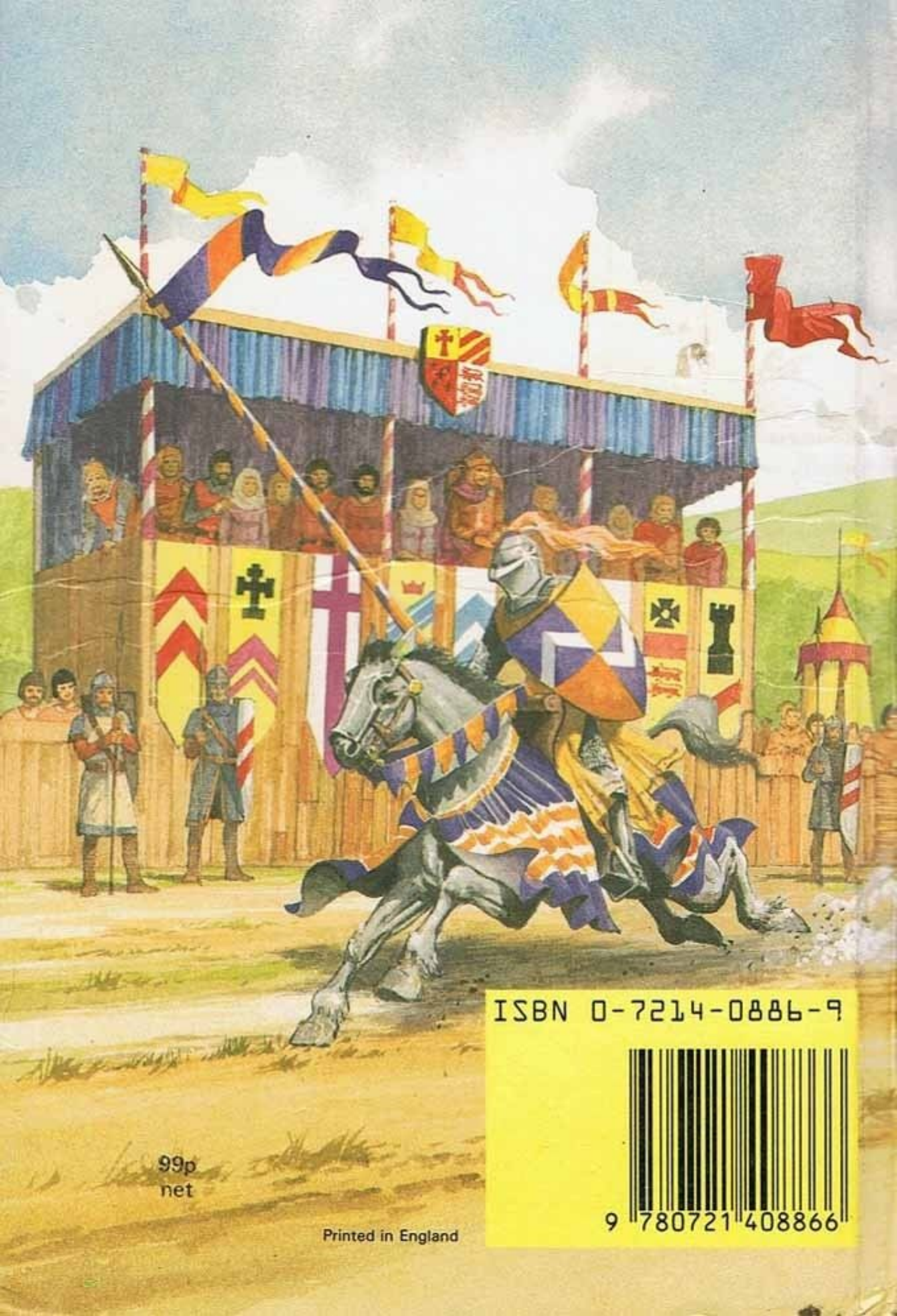
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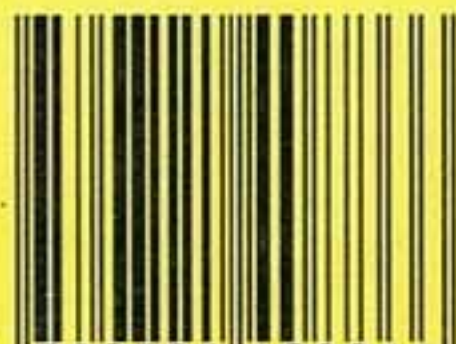
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